

APPROVED: Meeting No. 36-95

ATTEST: *Paula S. Jewell*

MAYOR AND COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND
Meeting No. 17A-95

March 21, 1995

The Mayor and Council of Rockville, Maryland, convened in Worksession in the Council Chamber, Rockville City Hall, 111 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland, on March 21, 1995, at 7:35 p.m.

PRESENT

Mayor James F. Coyle

Councilmember Robert E. Dorsey

Councilmember James T. Marrinan

Councilmember Rose G. Krasnow

Councilmember Nina A. Weisbroth

In attendance: Acting City Manager Rick Kuckkahn, and City Clerk Paula Jewell. Also in attendance: Assistant City Manager Cheryl Lampkin, Community Service Director Josephine Roberts, and Human Rights Officers Teresa James and Michael Mitchell.

Re: Worksession with Human Rights
Commission (HRC)

The Mayor and Council met with Commission Chair Mayo Robertson and Commissioners Carol Hannaford, Douglas Jones, Claudia Segal, Yasmin Lluveras, William Sherman, and Linda Thompson. Mr. Robertson noted that the Commission had met with the Mayor and Council in October and had since held a worksession regarding the refocus of HRC. They felt they had a sense of the Mayor and Council's goal, however, no formal

decision was formed and there were still areas where issues needed to be clarified:

- a. What is the impetus for refocusing the Commission? (philosophy, budget, etc.?)
- b. What is a meaningful role of the Human Rights Commissioners under the refocus plan?
- c. Concerns have been expressed about the human rights of citizens
- d. Concerns have been expressed about the plans to change staffing levels.

Mayor Coyle noted the historical background of the Human Rights Commission and said there have also been concerns about the handling of caseloads, the timeliness of case completion, and the status of the Commissioners. However, Mayor Coyle noted that HRC's role in community activities have been good. The evolution of the HRC was discussed over a couple of years and the community mediation idea was brought up over a year ago after it was found that there was a low level of cases generally and there was little involvement of Commissioners in those cases. The Mayor and Council felt that they were reacting to the need for a new role of community mediation, as the City was retreating from the area of human rights. Mayor Coyle noted that the Mayor and Council were not reducing the commitment to human rights; in fact, they were heightening the role of human rights. Funding for case processing was also an issue as not many Rockville residents were being served. Councilmember Krasnow said that she felt the decision from the last worksession was

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that one or the other methods could only be done--not both, and she said the Human Rights Commission seemed to support the idea of community mediation.

Councilmember Dorsey said that it must be recognized that there were other resources, i.e., the State and the County, that could handle human rights cases while maintaining the spirit of the City's Human Rights Ordinance and the City's influence over the process.

Councilmember Marrinan noted that the issue left from the last worksession was how Rockville residents would handle human rights issues. He said he thought an agreement was reached and that the only issue to be completely resolved was as the new phase of community mediation was being brought in, how the old focus would be phased out.

Mr. Robertson said that the Commissioners did not feel it was an either or decision; they saw community mediation as an expanded role of the HRC that would call for an additional commitment of funds. They also understood the budget constraints but were concerned about abolishing an enforced commitment to human rights. Ms. Hannaford added that Human Rights Commission wanted to keep the monitoring role for cases that come to the City as well as the freedom of input to the State and County, when called for. There were also concerns whether other government levels will deal adequately with the City's cases, and it was felt that businesses would benefit by the City's successful handling of cases. Mr. Jones noted that there were three cases regarding public accommodations in the City and he said that these should be the primary concern to the Mayor and Council and not whether the applicants resided in the City.

Councilmember Marrinan reminded everyone that the directive this budget year has been for no new programs. Ms. Hannaford noted that the City's Police Department has been involved in community mediation and they did not have the resources to continue this program. It had been suggested that the community Services Department would be assigned to handle these cases. In this light, Ms. Hannaford said the program was not new; it was just being redirected.

Ms. Hannaford then read a memo she had written to the Mayor and Council addressing concerns about the inability of the Commission to work with staff over the past three years. She noted specific complaints regarding HRC minutes and lack of staff follow-up to phone calls, requests for information, and other actions. Ms. Hannaford's letter and a letter written by Commissioner Doug Jones also alleged that the Commission was not consulted about the reorganization process. Ms. Hannaford suggested that the Mayor and Council review former Commissioner Barbara Holmes' letter of resignation which, she said, also pointed out instances of failed communications between commission members and staff.

Mr. Kuckkahn was directed to meet with the Commission regarding the allegations of staff disconnect and lack of communication and report back to the Mayor and Council with recommendations on case handling and community mediation including the costs involved in both options.

The Human Rights Commission asked that the time-line for implementing the refocus plan be extended. Staff was directed to resolve the issues before the transition plan

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was implemented. Staff was also directed to hold off on filling the HRC vacancies until all the issues were resolved.

Re: Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and Council, the Worksession was adjourned at 10:20 p.m. to reconvene in General Session on March 27, 1995 at 7:30 p.m., or at the call of the Mayor.